

A DARK MATTER

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Characters:

URSULA, College physics student home for the holidays.

CAL, High-school senior; Ursula's brother.

MARTHA, Ursula's mother.

GEORGE, Ursula's father. It would be nice if that actor who plays him could sing and whistle.

BONNIE, Martha's mother and Ursula's grandmother.

Set:

There are two primary spaces: The "downstairs," which consists of a kitchen (upstage), a dining room table (downstage R), and an armchair (downstage L), and "upstairs" directly over the kitchen which consists of Ursula's barren bedroom and the hallway outside it. A stairway connects the upstairs hallway to the downstairs at center.

Lighting:

The lighting for the two parts of the set should be different: something warm and holiday-like for the downstairs, and something stark and abstract for Ursula's room.

Props:

Suitcase

Newspaper

Groceries

Mop

Christmas garland and wreath

Wrapped copy of Romeo and Juliet

Ham

1000 ball-pit balls (90% black, 10% colored)

Other:

A screen onto which titles and images will be projected

A Dark Matter

The First Problem

Ursula's room. She is playing with a black ball, tossing it lightly and catching it. The opening measures of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto play softly, then fade when Ursula speaks.

URSULA

Dark matter. It sounds like something out of science fiction: *dark matter*. It's real, though. We can't see it because it doesn't emit light. We only know it's there because of gravity. Objects in space feel its pull, only we see nothing there. Absolute silence. What is it? Why is it? Whatever it is, dark matter is really here. And I have to know more.

URSULA resumes playing with the ball.

Introduction

Downstairs. BONNIE is sitting in a plush armchair, reading a newspaper, with a drink. MARTHA casually stirs gravy on the stove. A suitcase sits near the door. A few measures of 'Sleigh Ride' play.

BONNIE

Lord-Jesus-in-Heaven-Above, politicians these days!

MARTHA

Watch your language, Mom. You made me promise to shoot you if you ever got religious.

BONNIE

Or if I get Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cancer, heart disease, lung disease, cirrhosis, or diabetes.

MARTHA

Yes, Mother.

BONNIE

Or if I vote Republican!

MARTHA
I'll add it to the list.

BONNIE
And scratch the cirrhosis. If I've gotta go, I might as well go drunk.

Telephone rings.

BONNIE
Can you get that, Hon?

MARTHA
Mom, you're sitting right next to it!

Phone rings again.

BONNIE
It's time you start doing me favors in my old age. Besides, it's not for me unless the AARP is asking for money, in which case you'll hang up anyway.

MARTHA answers the phone.

MARTHA
Hellooooo? Hi, Dr. Parker. (*Walking downstage and away from Bonnie, out of earshot.*) Merry Christmas! Why are you calling today? The test results... Oh. I see. How much...? Oh. But we can't...well, I'll figure something out. Thank you for taking the time to call me on Christmas Eve. Yes, I will. Merry Christmas.

BONNIE
What was that all about?

MARTHA
Nothing. Here, let me get you a drink.

BONNIE resumes reading her paper. A key jangles in the door, and GEORGE bursts through. He is wearing a snow-capped hat with earflaps and carrying too many bags of groceries.

GEORGE
Phew, is it snowing out there!

GEORGE puts down the bags, takes his hat off, and shakes a pile of snow onto the floor.

MARTHA

George, not again! Here, clean it up.

MARTHA hands him a mop. GEORGE puts the hat back on and sweeps the pile of snow. GEORGE begins unloading groceries into the fridge while MARTHA makes Bonnie a drink. GEORGE pulls out a garland and a wreath.

GEORGE

Where do these go?

MARTHA

Oh, I don't know! Just do something with them.

"Deck the Halls plays," and GEORGE whistles along as he decorates. He dances up the stairs as he wraps the garland around the banister, straightening the bow on the wreath as a final touch.

GEORGE

Perfect! Dance with me, Martha.

MARTHA

I'm not in a dancing mood.

GEORGE

It's Christmas!

MARTHA

Oh, all right.

They dance. MARTHA cheers up. A key jangles in the door, and CAL enters wearing a basketball uniform.

MARTHA

Hi honey! How was practice?

CAL

Fine. *(He goes to the fridge, takes a gallon of milk, and drinks.)*

MARTHA

Cal, not from the carton!

GEORGE

But yes, drink your milk! We want you to grow big and strong to impress the ladies, right?

CAL

(Spitting out some milk.) Dad! *(Seeing the suitcase.)* Is Ursula home?

MARTHA

Her plane made it out just before the storm hit. She's upstairs.

CAL bounds upstairs.

MARTHA

Don't bother your sister too much, she's tired from her journey!

CAL

I'm sure she's fine!

The Second Problem

*CAL paces outside Ursula's room.
Inside, URSULA is tossing the black ball
and catching it.*

CAL

(Deep voice) Hey Ursula, it's... no. No. *(A little higher, and his voice cracks.)*
Ursula! I haven't seen you in – no. *(Clears throat.)* Merry Christmas, Ursula!
Welcome home from college, again. Just like last year. *(Laughs.)* Oh god, what
the hell... I mean, she's just my sister. *(He stops pacing and paws at his hair,
pushing his bangs in what he hopes is a dashing and mature side-sweep.)* Oh
Calvin, you stud. *(Now tentatively, knocking.)* Ursula? Can I come in?

URSULA hides the ball.

URSULA

Yeah, Cal?

*CAL enters. URSULA runs to him and
gives him a bone-cracking hug.*

URSULA
How's my baby brother?

CAL
Ow, will you please stop calling me that?

URSULA
Too bad your brains haven't shot up like your height these past few months.
How've ya been?

CAL
I've been better. College applications suck.

URSULA
That's not what I meant. Any cute girls lately?

CAL
None.

URSULA
That's a shame. Whatever happened to that girl—

CAL
Denise?

URSULA
That one. Name almost as ugly as mine.

CAL
She started seeing Dick.

URSULA
Ugh, does he really call himself that?

CAL
Yeah. It's his power symbol. Ultimate manhood. What about you?

URSULA
Nothing.

CAL
The handsome professor?

URSULA
Married.

CAL
Ouch. You're sure?

URSULA
Saw the ring. And the wife.

CAL
Hah, serves you right!

*CAL tickles URSULA. She wriggles
away shrieking.*

CAL
Now that that's out of the way, how have you really been?

URSULA
Charmed. Research is charming.

CAL
Dark matter, right?

URSULA
Yeah. The stuff that you—

CAL
Can't see.

URSULA
You remembered.

CAL
I remember everything you say. (*Beat.*) So... are you taking any English
classes?

URSULA
Are you kidding me?

CAL
You took one last year—

URSULA
To fulfill graduation requirements.

CAL
You used to love English.

URSULA

Once, maybe, but no more! It was a fickle love, as inconstant as the moon...

CAL

But the moon has phases, so your love of the written word will return.

URSULA

You're supposed to compliment me for remembering my Romeo and Juliet!

CAL

Indeed, perhaps you have a drop of it left in you.

URSULA

No, Cal. We agreed to leave that behind us.

CAL

But remember—

URSULA

Yes, Cal. I remember everything.

MARTHA

(From downstairs.) Kids, dinner's ready!

URSULA

Oh god. The annual ritual.

CAL

I'll protect you. Well, I'll try.

URSULA and CAL go downstairs.

Hypothesis

Downstairs, the table is set with silverware and seasonal dish ware. MARTHA lights the candles on the table. GEORGE is ogling at the ham as it cools on the counter; he is poised with a carving fork and an enormous knife, itching to dive in. Music: "Santa Baby." URSULA and CAL rush down the stairs.

BONNIE *(offstage)*

Presents!

BONNIE enters wearing a Santa Claus hat.

BONNIE
Presents for all!

BONNIE mimes putting a sack of presents down.

CAL
Where's your sack, Santa?

BONNIE
I'm too old to carry that junk around. This year all of my presents are digital.

BONNIE sits at the table.

URSULA
You don't know how to use a computer.

BONNIE
I had Martha do my Internet shopping. She'll do anything to keep up appearances, even if it means spending her own money to buy my Christmas gifts for you. *(She sits.)* Now what you could do for me, young man, is pour this old bag o' bones a drink.

CAL
(Picking up a bottle on the counter.) Chianti.

BONNIE
Have you tried it?

MARTHA
Mom, he's only seventeen...

BONNIE
What the hell, girl, it's Christmas!

MARTHA
Oh, all right. Just one drink.

URSULA pulls two wine glasses out of the cupboard. CAL fills them almost to the top.

GEORGE

(Poised over the ham, salivating.) Can I carve it yet?

MARTHA

(Smacking his greedy hands away.) Let it cool!

GEORGE

But then it'll be cold.

MARTHA

You cut yourself last year. We don't want you to bleed all over the meat again.

(Noticing the over-full wine glasses) Cal, that's way too much!

URSULA

(Taking her glass) Bombs away!

URSULA chugs half the glass.

BONNIE

Now that's the way to start dinner.

MARTHA

(To Cal.) Take it slow, honey.

CAL glances around apprehensively and takes a sip. There is a moment of silence. During the next few lines, URSULA tops off her glass and begins to drink, not as fast as before, but still too fast for comfort.

GEORGE

That's it, I'm going in!

MARTHA

Let it cool!

BONNIE

Ugh, here they go.

GEORGE and MARTHA converge on the ham, and for a while they are tangled up. The knife and carving fork flail around a good deal, and it's a miracle that no one loses an eye. The squabble ends with MARTHA holding

the ham, exasperated but triumphant. Somehow it got itself carved during the fraças. She carries it to the table.

MARTHA
Dinner... (*plop*) is served.

Everyone sits. GEORGE and CAL have a contest of who can load more ham onto his plate and eat it. CAL is justified in this, since he is seventeen and playing sports. GEORGE gets the fork stuck.

MARTHA
(*To Ursula.*) Cal is thinking of majoring in English.

CAL
We just started a unit on *Romeo and Juliet*.

GEORGE
Aha! (*He spears the air with his fork, which still has a chunk of ham on it.*)
A story of violence and family feud! Have you got to the good parts yet?

CAL
It's all good parts. But...I'd say it's more about love than violence.

URSULA
Love! I'd say it's more about the dangers of teenage romance, with all the sneaking around, and how quickly everything happens. Anyway, it can't be about love because Romeo's the most miserable whiny fuck I've ever seen, on the page or in person. Juliet didn't love him; she just wanted to get her panties dirty.
(*She drinks.*)

MARTHA
Ursula!

CAL
She has a point. Romeo goes after Juliet rather quickly. But I like to give them the benefit of the doubt. Who are we to judge love?

MARTHA
We're taking Cal to visit Yale over February break.

URSULA
Why? He's already seen the campus.

MARTHA

It's different when you take the admissions tour. They write your name down. They know who you are. You have a better chance of getting in.

URSULA

Mom, they don't keep track of those things.

MARTHA

I know you think you're miss smarty pants since you go there, but trust me on this one. I am older and wiser than you, and I will do whatever it takes to make sure both of my children go to Ivy League schools.

URSULA

But what if Cal wants to go somewhere else?

CAL

Can we please stop talking about me in the third person?

BONNIE

More wine!

They refill the wine glasses and eat in silence for a moment.

GEORGE

So Ursula, aren't we lucky you got in ahead of the storm?

URSULA

I had a place to stay, if I didn't.

MARTHA

I thought they closed the dorms over winter break?

URSULA

My professor offered to let me stay at his place.

GEORGE

How nice!

MARTHA

Would that have been appropriate?

URSULA

Sure! I mean, we stay up all night at his place every week. My whole physics class, I mean. He bakes us brownies and gives us hints while we work on the

problem set and play with his corgis. It's like a second home to me. (*Direct address.*) Actually, these days it's like a first home to me.

BONNIE

So you're still doing that physics stuff?

MARTHA

Even though you're getting no sleep. I mean, surely there's something easier you could do.

URSULA

I want to do physics.

MARTHA

Sweetheart, we know you're very smart, but you don't need to do physics on top of your Ivy League education. Isn't a degree from Yale enough? Who cares what it's in? Besides, if you had a little more time, you could get a part-time job to support your education--

URSULA

It's my life!

GEORGE

It's college, Martha! Let her do what she wants.

MARTHA

But if you can't keep up with your classmates, you won't be able to get a job. With your GPA as low as it is--

URSULA

A 3.0 is fine! Do you know how hard I work for those Bs? And my classmates stay up all night too. Most of us do, anyway.

MARTHA

Listen to me, Sweetpea. Some of those boys in your class are really good, and--listen to me!--they are going to get the jobs you want. You have to be smart about this.

URSULA

But I'm doing research! My very own research! And none of my classmates--not even that guy who won the International Physics Olympiad--know as much about it as I do.

MARTHA

That was just a summer project. You're not getting paid for it anymore.

URSULA

This is my life, mom. Can't you just accept it and support me?

GEORGE

I support you, darling.

BONNIE

What's all this research about then, anyway? It better be good if you're doing it for free.

For the rest of the scene, Ursula is isolated in a spotlight during direct address, and the lighting returns to normal when she addresses her family again. She drinks frequently when she is not talking, as if this is a drinking game that she is losing.

URSULA

(*Direct address.*) I hate this part. I call it the "Oh-my-god-Ursula-is-studying-scary-things-beyond-our-understanding" part. (*To Bonnie.*) I'm studying dark matter.

GEORGE

I recently heard a documentary on PBS about that stuff – dark matter. Very interesting subject.

MARTHA

What is dark matter?

URSULA

(*Direct address.*) This is the worst part. I don't know what dark matter is. Nobody knows what it is. Fifteen hours a week of research, no money, no sleep, a plummeting GPA, and nothing to show for it.

MARTHA

What is dark matter?

BONNIE

Come on, Ursula. Answer your mother.

URSULA

You won't understand it.

MARTHA

Don't be snooty, now.

URSULA
Nobody knows.

BONNIE
What do you mean? How can you study it if nobody knows?

MARTHA
Is this some sort of ruse?

GEORGE
It's quite simple, really. Dark matter is—

URSULA
It's not simple, Dad. Whoever figures it out will win a Nobel Prize.

MARTHA
Nobel Prize!

BONNIE
What's so special about this stuff? If it ain't made of alcohol, it better be something else good.

URSULA
It behaves differently from everything else in the universe.

BONNIE
Sounds like alcohol.

URSULA
No, it's not like any material we have ever experienced. It must be a new particle, or matter in an extra dimension, or

BONNIE
Extra dimension? Could it suck us up? Could we all die? Now that would be a way to go--

URSULA
Oh my god.

Spotlight on CAL, who stands.

CAL
Don't worry about them. Just talk to me. I promise I won't trample all over your heart.

*URSULA stands. She and CAL move
downstage C.*

URSULA

Dark matter was something wrong with the universe, something unexpected. It remained hidden for 14 billion years--we only started noticing it in the past hundred years. You can't shine a light on it. It looks like it's not there even when it curls like a muscle through our entire galaxy, pumping the motions of the stars and our sun as they bob and weave and revolve. Its presence throws the story of the universe off course. Can you imagine, even with all the light from the stars, it's like we're feeling around in the dark. I once heard you have to go blind to kiss a god.

CAL

What do you mean?

URSULA

The most beautiful things in the world are the things you can't see. Dark matter. The velvet blackness between the stars.

CAL

Thunder without lightning. The moment between winter haze and snow.

*URSULA and CAL speak without
hearing each other.*

URSULA

(At Cal) You. Although you're too young to know it.

CAL

How far can you see with a telescope?

URSULA

I'm transparent to you.

CAL

Tell me about stars. Do they have lives? Stories?

URSULA

More so than you can imagine.

CAL

Tell me everything.

URSULA

Dammit, Call!

Blackout.

Bias

Kitchen. MARTHA and GEORGE are doing the dishes together. Martha is efficient: sleeves rolled up, getting down to business, whereas George cleans each dish to its own unique perfection.

MARTHA
Pass me the towel, please.

GEORGE
I thought I was drying.

MARTHA
You dry slower than I wash, so I'm helping you.

GEORGE
Dishes are hard to dry. They're slippery.

MARTHA
Would you like to switch places?

They switch. GEORGE happily whistles 'Let it Snow' as he washes one dish. MARTHA dries all of the wet dishes in twenty seconds. MARTHA crosses her arms, uncrosses them, checks her watch, paces a bit as she waits for GEORGE to finish.

MARTHA
This isn't working.

GEORGE
It's working just fine. Look how clean this is.

GEORGE holds the plate up to the light, shines the rim and beams. MARTHA snatches the plate away from him and dries it.

MARTHA
It's a plate.

GEORGE
But it's such a nice plate.

MARTHA
How can I expect Ursula to figure out her whole life when you and I can't even...
Forget it.

MARTHA throws down the towel and exits. BONNIE enters.

BONNIE
Have you seen Cal and Ursula?

GEORGE
No. Why?

BONNIE
I thought they were watching Romeo and Juliet. The TV's on, but they're not there.

GEORGE
Perhaps they're outside? (*Trembling.*) Because the weather outside is snowing...

BONNIE
...and the wind is really blowing. You poor soul, left alone in the cold without so much as a drink. Drying?

GEORGE nods. BONNIE takes the towel and dries as he washes.

Experiment

Ursula's bedroom. The storm is blowing loudly outside. URSULA is reading a book about dark matter. CAL goes to the window and rubs a circle to look through. He peers out but cannot see anything.

CAL

I can't even see the Duncans' house. What a storm! Well? Don't you have anything to say about it? Like, "I'm glad my flight got in because I love spending time with you?" Or, we can pretend this is the quiet car and have silent reading. I'll just borrow "How to Get Into an Ivy League School," since according to our parents that's the most valuable thing to my education right now.

URSULA

I don't have that book.

CAL

Of course you don't. You didn't need anything like that to get into Yale, you just waltzed in the way you waltz into everything, like it's no big deal!

URSULA

That's not true.

CAL

Oh really? What did you write your college essay about?

URSULA

I don't remember.

CAL

Yes you do. I bet it was a work of art on your first try. I bet you can recite a few choice lines for me. Go ahead, say them.

URSULA

It was about dark matter.

CAL

Of course. A natural choice. (*Beat.*) Can I read it?

URSULA

Why? It's not like you're writing one on dark matter.

CAL

Not to study it, just to read it. Because I want to read something about you. Something by you.

URSULA

We need some props.

Hundreds of ball-pit balls fall into Ursula's room. 90% of them are black, the other 10% are colored.

URSULA
More.

*Hundreds more fall into into her room.
The number of balls should be
overwhelming.*

URSULA
Okay, that's better.

CAL
(*Picking up a ball.*) What is this?

URSULA
My college essay. These are pieces of our galaxy.

CAL
Like stars?

URSULA
Stars, stardust, glowing globules of gas (*she raises a colored ball in one hand*)
and dark matter (*raising a black ball in the other hand*).

CAL
Cool. (*He tosses the ball in the air and catches it.*)

URSULA
Careful with that! We are going to set up an experiment. You have to keep
everything controlled, otherwise, the experiment could get contaminated. Put it
down here. (*CAL carefully places the ball.*) This is the galaxy. I'll be the center
of the galaxy.

CAL
You're the center of the universe.

URSULA
Yes, and so are you, because the universe has no center. But let's focus for a
minute.

CAL
You're the center.

URSULA
Of the galaxy.

CAL

That seems like a pretty big responsibility.

URSULA

I'm a super-massive black hole. You're a piece of dust.

CAL

Ouch. Can we trade roles?

URSULA

Maybe later. You, piece of dust, are orbiting the center of the galaxy.

CAL

As always.

CAL picks up a colored ball and walks around URSULA, slowly, hungrily. There are so many balls on the floor he will inevitably shift them, and some of them will fall downstairs to the kitchen. MARTHA enters downstairs to take the pie out of the oven.

URSULA

Okay, good. Keep that exact speed.

CAL

Why?

URSULA

Because the matter inside your orbit dictates your speed.

Downstairs, MARTHA hears something fall. While URSULA and CAL continue their experiment, she picks up a piece of dark matter, inspects it, looks up at the ceiling. Her curiosity refreshes her and pushes away her sadness; she is a mother now. She goes upstairs, unhurried.

CAL

Okay. Now what?

URSULA

Now, you're going to be a piece of dust farther out.

CAL
Can't I be closer in?

URSULA
Just do what I say.

CAL
Here?

URSULA
That's fine. Now, I want you to keep orbiting me, at exactly the same speed as before.

CAL
Why the same speed?

URSULA
Because of the dark matter. It pulls you along.

CAL
Isn't it you that's doing the pulling? The big black hole, I mean?

URSULA
Even black holes aren't that strong. Dark matter is bigger and stronger.

CAL
You're strong.

URSULA
Not always.

CAL moves toward her and embraces her.

CAL
I'm sorry they said those things. I'm sorry they hurt you.

URSULA
I'm fine.

CAL
No, it's not fine. That's not the way to treat someone you love. (*He strokes her cheek.*) Why can't we just be together? Here, in this forgotten corner of the galaxy, who's watching?

MARTHA arrives outside Ursula's bedroom and knocks on the door. URSULA and CAL jump away from each other.

Contamination

MARTHA
(Calling) Ursula, Cal, it's time for dessert.

URSULA
I'm not hungry, Mom.

MARTHA
You've never skipped dessert in your life. *(She turns the ball in her hands.)* Can I talk to you for a minute?

URSULA
After dessert?

MARTHA
Now, please.

URSULA
(Opens the door, but only enough to stick her head out.) What?

MARTHA
Do you know what this is? *(She hands the ball to URSULA.)*

URSULA
No idea.

MARTHA
I found it in the kitchen.

URSULA
Then maybe you should put it back there.

MARTHA
It fell from...

URSULA
The sky? Please, Mom. You're sounding a little crazy.

MARTHA

Yes, maybe. Today has been so... (*She tries to peer into Ursula's room, but URSULA gets in her way.*) Is everything all right?

URSULA

Yes, everything's fine. Maybe we'll come down for dessert in a bit. You do make the best pie.

MARTHA

Okay then...I just want to make sure you're okay.

URSULA

We're fine.

MARTHA

Okay.

URSULA

Bye. (*She shuts the door.*) We're not in some remote corner of the galaxy, Cal. The only place we ever meet is this dark corner of my bedroom, pressed up against thin walls. Every touch, every tender moment, is stolen out of time and space. This can't be. They'll see us. They'll see everything.

CAL

Then let's go somewhere else.

URSULA

Where? We can leave this house, but we are brother and sister everywhere we go.

CAL

A darker corner. One where they can't see us. We will hide away in our imagination.

URSULA

I know that place.

CAL

Meet you there in ten.

Discussion

Downstairs, BONNIE is enjoying a nightcap. MARTHA is studying her piece of dark matter.

MARTHA

Mom, have you ever seen anything like this before?

BONNIE

(Peering at the piece of dark matter) I can't see it with these old eyes. *(To the audience.)* Can you see it?

MARTHA

(Handing the ball to her.) Here.

BONNIE

Oh, it's heavy!

MARTHA

You know what it is?

BONNIE

(She rolls it around between her hands, bounces it, licks it, essentially experiments with it for a minute.) Nope. But it sure is interesting. *(She hands it back to MARTHA.)* Well, off to bed with me.

BONNIE exits. MARTHA looks at the dark matter and weighs it with her hand, wondering. She repeats Bonnie's motions. GEORGE enters. He stares at her for a minute, nodding as if what she is doing makes complete sense. MARTHA notices him and jumps in her seat. She hides the dark matter in her pocket.

MARTHA

George! What are you doing? You're supposed to be asleep.

GEORGE

For once I'm not the crazy one. Oh, just getting another slice of pie. And I'm not sleeping, I'm watching Romeo and Juliet. For your information, Mercutio just died. It's the saddest part of the story because he's the only character with some imagination, and he never gets to be in love!

MARTHA

What's wrong?

GEORGE

You always keep everything so proper and in its place. Our house. Our holidays. Our children's lives. My life. But you screwed up this time, Martha. Or maybe everything else is just a cover for this.

MARTHA
What are you getting at?

GEORGE
Come on, Martha. I know we're in debt.

MARTHA
You don't know that! You don't know anything!

GEORGE
Then explain this.

GEORGE pulls a ball of dark matter from his pocket. Instinctively, MARTHA reaches for hers. It is gone.

GEORGE
How much are we in debt?

MARTHA
I can't control it. Cancer.

GEORGE?
What?

MARTHA
I have breast cancer. Dr. Parker called while you were out.

GEORGE
Oh...gosh, I'm so sorry, Martha. What do we need to do?

MARTHA
We can't pay college tuition.

GEORGE
It's okay, Cal can get a scholarship at a state school--

MARTHA
For Ursula. We'll have to take her out of college until this is all over.

GEORGE
We're gonna beat this, honey. How long it it going to take?

MARTHA
Am I ruining her life, George? Can she go back to physics if she stops now?
Will everything be okay?

GEORGE

I don't know. I don't have any of the answers.

Results

Ursula's room. URSULA and CAL are dressed as Juliet and Romeo.

CAL

Do you still have my sword?

URSULA

Sure thing, Romeo. It's somewhere over there.

URSULA indicates offstage. CAL reaches offstage and grabs the sword. URSULA giggles.

CAL

What?

URSULA

Your sword.

CAL

What about it?

URSULA

It's a sword. Don't they teach you what those are in high school?

CAL

Really, Juliet. Sometimes a sword's just a sword.

He unsheathes it and begins to move it experimentally.

URSULA

In theater, everything is all of its possible meanings. There is no definite answer.

CAL

That's what you always liked about theater. The dark place where your imagination could run wild.

URSULA

That dark place. I could go there, when there was nowhere else.

CAL

And you took me with you.

URSULA

For an adventure.

CAL

Why me?

URSULA

You're my brother. You're like me. You're the only one crazy enough to follow.

CAL

I have something for you. For our adventure. *(He puts down the sword and pulls a present out of his pocket and gives it to her.)* Go on, open it.

URSULA opens the present. It is a copy of Romeo and Juliet.

URSULA

Romeo and Juliet.

CAL

Read the inside cover.

URSULA opens it, reads the inside cover, smiles. CAL watches her read. Time stops, and we hear what she has been thinking all along. Downstairs, MARTHA and GEORGE enter from opposite sides. They are bathed in stark light. They dance. It is a slow, sad dance.

URSULA

(Direct address.) Someday, it will end. We'll find someone else, marry, have kids. And then what will happen at Christmas dinner? Maybe we won't see each other anymore. But if we do, there's this endless string of heartaches waiting for us. Our imagined future passing through us like ghosts, invisible to the world, but exploding bright as bombs in two secret chambers. And he knows I love him, and I'm powerless to stop it. I'm sorry, Cal. I'm sorry for what I've done, what we've done. But you know what? It's a funny thing. I'm not sorry I love you. Not one bit.

MARTHA and GEORGE exit, and the lights go off downstairs. Time resumes.

URSULA

(Beaming about the present.) Thank you. I haven't had time to buy your present yet, with finals and everything.

CAL

That's okay, I know what I want. At dinner, you said something about extra dimensions. I want you to give me a dimension, Ursula. A dimension where it's okay for us to be in love.

URSULA

I don't know, Cal. I'll try to explain it to you. We live in three dimensions of space, one dimension of time. But aren't those arbitrary numbers? I mean, what's so special about the number three? Couldn't there be a fourth dimension we aren't aware of? Like how characters in a play think their whole universe is the stage, but the audience knows that there is space beyond the stage, a whole world outside the theater. They will go home and eat a late dinner, walk the dog, call their parents. The actors will too. But what happens to Romeo, after the show is over and before the next show begins? Romeo and Juliet only exist in the play. No matter how hard you beg Romeo not to drink the poison, he can't hear you, because you're in a different dimension. Our universe could be like this. You and I are stuck in three dimensions. But perhaps dark matter is not. Perhaps dark matter fills space beyond the small stage of our universe, watching us play out the insignificant acts of our lives. It could pass through us and then leave for the great beyond, but in its passing pull on our bones and hearts in a measurable way. It's a beautiful idea, but it is impossible to test.

CAL

All the world's a stage, huh. Let's try.

URSULA

What?

CAL

Do an experiment.

URSULA

(Incredulous.) How?

CAL

Like this.

*CAL picks up a piece of dark matter,
and throws it into the audience.
URSULA and CAL watch it fall.*

Conclusion

URSULA
Oh!

*CAL, happy with his success, throws
another piece of dark matter into the
audience.*

URSULA
I never thought that would work.

*CAL grabs as many pieces of dark
matter as he can in each hand, and
throws them all, one by one. URSULA
does the same. They start slowly at
first, but the pace quickens, and they
scramble to the floor to pick up and
throw as many as they can, even
armloads. Also, it is important that
many of these balls don't make it to the
audience, but fall short and land in the
living room. Downstairs, BONNIE,
GEORGE and MARTHA enter, attracted
by the dark matter's gravity, and the
gravity of the situation at hand with their
children.*

URSULA
Oh! Oh! *(They are dumping balls by the armloads.)* Oh Cal, you're a genius! It's
like a dream. I never thought it would be so easy to go here...an extra
dimension! To the place I could let my imagination run wild. It is dark...

GEORGE
So dark!

MARTHA
...but beautiful.

*BONNIE, GEORGE and MARTHA begin
to go upstairs.*

URSULA
...and beautiful.

CAL
I think I am blind now.

URSULA and CAL stop throwing the balls and look at each other. They hover at the gateway to another dimension, a dimension in which they are allowed to fall in love. This takes time. They kiss, and fall. Romeo and Juliet appear on the screen, also kissing, also forgetting where they come from, unaware of where they are going. BONNIE, GEORGE and MARTHA arrive in Ursula's room.

BONNIE
Ain't nothing up here to see, but it sure feels like someone's been here.

End of play.